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# The Student

Winter 1985

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# The Student

Winter 1985

EDITORS

*Mary Ellen Lloyd* *Mary Elizabeth Sutton*

STAFF

*Katherine Allan*
*Karen Amidon*
*Kim Clark*
*Bonnie Flett*
*Carrie Galloway*
*David Kellogg*
*Lauren Mohler*
*F. M. O'Roark*
*David Peterson*
*Jeannie Sinclair*
*Martha Sisk*
*Sharon Stanziano*

ADVISORS

*Lee Potter* *Bynum Shaw*

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# *Poetry*

## SMALL TALK

My words
ready
to reflect
your
question
burning
I build
a wall
cool
it shatters
but words
come
to lead you
twisting
until you
forget what
I said
last
you will
never find
the door
to the room
behind my
smile

## TEACHING CHILDREN THE ART OF TREES

The first thing is this:
Trees are not brown,
Trees are gray.
If you went to kindergarten,
As I did, you learned
That trees are brown —
This is because there is no gray
In the small box of crayons.
Kindergarten is for
Idealists and liars,
Do not send your children there.
Tell them immediately,
As soon as they fall
Down & Out  red & screaming:
Shut up, trees are gray
And have the skins
Of very old men.
Another thing: for something
That is supposed to be alive
A tree is one of the deader
Looking things I know
& really dead things are made from it:
Pencils and rulers.
First grade dead things.
First grade is where they teach you
To spell "tree." A tree
looks nothing like the word "tree"
And nothing like the trees
They teach you to draw.
Do not send your children to first grade.
Instead tell them: Trees do not
Have big green balls on top of them.
No, trees have crooked branches
and greenyellowredorange leaves
And are rarely symmetrical.
Trees are very quiet
Unlike your children
Send them to second grade and
Get them the hell out of the house.

## TRUTH, JUSTICE, AND THE AMERICAN SOCK

I was Superman in first grade, and so was my sister.
On cold days, already late for school,
We would each put on five pairs of socks
And, numb-footed, leap tall buildings and unmade beds.
Momma just laughed and cooked oatmeal.

She told us about our father's Air Force argyles.
One pair was drowned in jet fuel,
Thereby made invulnerable.
They were not pleasant to wear, but
They never wore out —
Unlike the other pair, which became holey
And found rest in the ragbag.

I guess those gas-baptized socks are still around,
Inconspicuous on some trash heap,
Masquerading as mild-mannered garbage
But taking to the sky when no one looks up.

## SUICIDE HAS NEVER BEEN MY STYLE

Where is your life
Where is my death
Will they meet
at a wedding
or a funeral
A mourn of the living
A rejoice of the dead
Your breath draws my life
My life holds your breathing
We are intertwined
in our worlds
of sacrifice and suffering
The pain of Birth One
The freedom of birth two
A black veil covers my smile
As you weep through the white
Changing partners
was never easy

or should we dance
Alone

## LETTER

Raymond knows.
When the train pulls into town
he can smell the greasy onions and
hotdogs four miles away.
They slink out to him on the chill
of October's first night
and slide into his
Momma's house
While Hattie sits and rocks and drinks coffee
in her corner of the kitchen.

Something that glows like a bulb
on the end of a wire makes him
empty again
like his stomach 30 years ago when he said
goodbye to his momma and boarded a steel ship
full of fast-talking Yankees —
and he longs to follow long, sweet
mustard trails to the tracks
beyond the fairgrounds
to run his hand along the green and
orange stripes of the train
to sit at the back of the
glowing caboose with the man
watching black and white T.V.

He tells his momma he's going
this year, that the train's
going to spin like a double ferris
wheel after he packs up
the clapping jaws
of the Haunted House skeleton.
And he jokes about the bleached-blonde women
who walk from the train to the fair
and then back to the train.
Then he combs his beard and washes out
tobacco dribblings
before he puts on his "James E. Strates Show" hat —
before he takes out the letter from James E.
saying
Florida is nice. Won't you come?

Later, his momma takes the letter
from his hands when he's asleep
and Hattie laughs so hard
her coffee sloshes over into her lap
Not knowing
He is on that train,
Winking at a blonde,
Eating Hotdogs
All-the-way.

## PAINT FLAKES

The barn is in sore need of paint
and repair, and the fields deserve
better. The sheep need shearing, and
the chicken coop roof wants to keep
the rain out. I am like the cat
who stretches sleep from her paws, yawns,
licks her whiskers, and sleeps. The sun
sinks his fingers into my shoulders
to urge me, and paint flakes
from the barn walls.

## god

if you were
a piece of bread
i would let you mold
and heal the sick

if you were
a piece of clay
i would mold you
into a higher truth
so all could believe

if you were
a piece of higher truth
i would play devil's
advocate
and prove you
were really mold

## PERIMETERS

Once I heard our house breathe like a runner,
inhaling deeply through cracked windows.
The walls of my room cramped tightly
and I was trapped by muscles stronger than anything
I had known.

My brother was a runner
feet made ugly from miles
of tortured perimeters.
Dinner conversation revolved around times,
races won, races lost,
and at night the stairs groaned as my brother ran
up & down,
up & down.

We all went to his first race
and watched twenty skinny legs go in circles.
My brother finished so dead last
he could have fallen into an abyss
for all I cared.
I walked behind the dugout and rocked myself
and rocked myself;
they didn't find me for 15 minutes.

That night I dreamt our house died like a runner,
wooden ligaments stretching beyond support,
brick cracked as kneecaps,
paint peeling from the walls like muscle tearing from bone.
I woke to find myself
a body inside of a skeleton.
Through the bones
I could see a quarter moon
rock itself like a baby.

## MY BROTHER PLAYS THE GUITAR

The piano's silence resonates all around this room
Through the TV that's losing its color
        the books that are beginning to fade
        the newly upholstered furniture

Whenever I come home I play it
But our only books
Are from my childhood
When I took lessons from Mr. Pollack
When the keys were white
Greg practices upstairs while I try to improvise
Struggling for structure, something to build on
Falling on a pile of discord

My next trip home
I need to find out
How this thing works
Polish up those keys
Get under the lid
Get to know the wires, the cushions
The unvarnished wood
Learn the pitch
Of each single bone

## SIZZLING

Lying and listening to Frank sing
my emotions.
No cares or worries only stray flies.
Sizzling in the warmth of son.
No one else but four exist in the day
of Sun.
Ed's steaks. Sid Marc. White straps
underneath caressing.
Hey Pop wanna kick the ball.

## WASH DAY

Some say it will be like a feather
or a cloud
or a harp.

I doubt that.

More like a stained bedsheet
bleached and suspended from clothespins,
reflecting daybreak and billowing
in brisk dewy air
without fear of
folding.

## WINTERS WERE BAD FOR MY FATHER

My father made flowers in every yard we had
made them grow
made them bloom
made them what they are today.

You would never think him to be a
grower of things
walking out that door in the morning
in his dead green uniform &
dirty combat boots
but every afternoon he was outside
hands buried deep in earth.

One year he went to Viet Nam and the flowers died
even under my mother's kind hands
The first afternoon he came back
he looked at her and asked
what have you done?

But the flowers grew back
and every Spring in Kansas, in Virginia, in Texas
flowers grew back
in gardens he had left behind
each time we moved to another away.

Winters were bad for my father
the dirt gone from his hands
he stared at the backyard
not able to make anything
the ground gone cold.

## AT THE MOVIES

The linoleum in the ladies' room may have said it best:
there is something to being  hard & stained
so unnoticed that
nobody remembers your patterns.

I hate crying in public places
parties  libraries
buildings that smell like dead popcorn
but at the movies they kept saying she was crazy
on the grounds of
not listening to the voices of all her fathers.

She danced and was determined to dance
and not be undermined by the boys
who told their stories of the dancer
who moved with red fury.

She was a crazy bitch, all right,
thinking she could get away with that.
They just wrapped her up in brown paper
& threw her in a hole
with the rest of the women refusing
blood and babies and patterns on the wallpaper
which read: this is where you are.
The women died with crazy screams
dead like dirt.

When the lights came up
there were these two people in the theatre:
me & some old man who cried like crazy
tears on his skin like shiny gloss
like lipstick that lost its blood.

## LEAVING WITH GOETHE AND THE FIXER

I liked a girl named Harry.
She didn't like the company I kept — women.
Gone from my mind as she thunked the door shut.
Tomorrow is Wednesday and her name is Sal.
Too bad — I'm just passing through — life.
Maybe you will catch me — later.

## FISH STORY

Worm hugs
a hook
and waits
for death

With martyred air

And bated breath

## TO BE READ ALOUD

"Water repellent scarf,"
the label said.

I had to agree.

## JEFF BIGGS'S SHED

That week I stood down on the floor
and distributed nails, like cigars
at a birth, whenever Jeff's dad
called through the rafters for someone to hand
a few up. Jeff suggested I might
like to stay there, standing on that cement,
so I would always be Somebody.

But what a construction we built!
I'd thought sheds were supposed to be filled
full with tractors, and grass-seed, and practical
tools for the splitting of earth, shovels
and such. It was. But this shed had some stairs
on the side, which led to a door, and to where
a developer smell floated down from the eaves
and Jeff's darkroom made for a second story.

When I did get up top with the branches
I was to help block out the last chinks
of light. I stood on the plywood roof, looked
out through the limbs to the fields,
asked for a hammer. We solemnly spread down
the shingles, scooped up our nails, and pounded
all day, as if affixing permanent leaves.

## GLASS

I always hated diving boards, they assume
too much. I like to toe the water
just beforehand, to see if it's warm
or soft enough to enter

skull first, and to break the surface
slow, preparing each section —
feet, legs, hips —
my whole body for immersion

in chlorine. So why am I perched
on this high board, twenty feet above a girl
who imagines the foam of my splash
and her own silent entry, smooth and cool

as she could wish, and the tan in a Speedo
who couldn't care how I dive?
No matter how I do, he knows
he'll be flawless, and if I don't survive

past impact . . . no matter, just so long
as I get off the board. I wonder
what they'll do if I stay up here, watching
the sun boil across the water

until dark, if the bronze
will keep sitting on that bench
in full flex, like Rodin's
Thinker, if the girl will wrench

her neck staring, or if the divers
waiting turn will lose patience, will try to force
me to earth, one way or the other.
I wonder if, given the choice,

I'll climb my way down, or shatter glass.

# *Fiction*

## CARRERA

Gil turned around, surprised at the entrance of an unaccompanied woman. Within the oak paneled walls of the club the action had the effect of a bride showing up at the altar without a groom. He thought that perhaps the dark paintings of hunting dogs discouraged women from entering.

"Don't stare at her; it's rude," his father said. "No reason to make her feel uncomfortable."

"You didn't ask me here to teach me social graces," Gil said.

"No."

Every detail of his father's body language spoke of how at ease he felt in the false environment of the club, where members of both sexes appeared to have painted on faces for the evening.

"What did you think of Jeff's last dive? I haven't seen him miss one that badly since prep school," Gil said.

"People who live in glass houses . . ."

Gil rubbed a white striated line running down the inside of his left wrist. "Why do you keep bringing up the accident? All that's over now. I'm a swimmer and a damn good one."

"Not good enough to go to Nationals," his father said, looking at a photograph behind the bar, at the smiling faces of the American Cup winners and their yacht.

"Dad, what are you talking about? I've gone for the past three years."

"I mean really go, not just as part of a relay."

"How can you say that? You were a team man yourself."

"I suppose I was once."

In the pause that followed, Gil heard the click of ice against glass; even so fragile a sound could be heard above the conversations in the room.

"I wanted to be just like you, a team man."

"You'll understand when you get out in the real world. The game changes; the strategy has to as well."

"Mine won't," Gil said.

"About the meet, I'd like to give you a little extra incentive."

"I don't need any help. I have enough talent to make it on my own."

"I'm prepared to give you five thousand dollars if you make the cut, and another fifteen thousand if you make the finals," his father said with the tone a businessman uses at a merger.

"No. This time I'm doing it all by myself."

Not so long ago the stakes had been days at Six Flags, or bikes. He wondered how high they would get, to what level his father was prepared to take the contest.

"You know the manner in which you are accustomed to living takes quite a bit of money to sustain." His father motioned for another Scotch.

Gil shrugged his shoulders. "I still don't want any help from you. I've had twenty-one years of it, and look where it's gotten me."

"Into several good schools, and a few promising internships."

"I'll do fine on my own."

His father's shoulders relaxed against the black leather back of the chair, as he eased his forearms from the table.

"You'd have an easier time if you didn't drink. Leave the Scotch to old men like me." His father repeated childhood folklore. "Just remember that when your nose gets numb, other parts of your body lose feeling as well."

Gil's abdominal muscles shook. He was sure that had he still been a boy, he would have been laughing hard enough to cry. However, it had been years since he'd cried.

"Dad, since when is forty-six old? I doubt that you'll be ready for a wheel chair until next year, might even hold out for the year after."

"Are you questioning my physical prowess?" his father said, swallowing the rest of his drink in one gulp.

"Let's just say that you've passed from the sportscar stage into the sedan one. Now a well made sedan still handles well, but it doesn't have that zip."

"Depends on the driver."

"Maybe, but it just isn't designed to handle the same sort of demands."

His father leaned across the table, almost dragging his tie through the flame. "A bottle of Porto says that I can still whip your ass."

"At what, Ping-Pong?"

"Rule number one — never underestimate the competition. How about number of laps?"

"I could swim laps for six weeks after they'd buried you."

"Underwater, without coming up for air?" His father pushed his chair away from the table, and leaned over him.

"I don't think that's a wise idea. Anyway, the pool's closed for the night."

"Real swimming isn't done in an indoor pool. What about down by the boat house?" His voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. "That is unless you're too chicken."

Like two brothers who had momentarily banded together for some mishievous deed, they waited for the valet to get their cars.

"Still know the way?" Gil asked as the valet brought the BMW to the door.

The slamming of the door was his father's only response.

Gil wished that the valet would hurry up with his car. He wanted to get to the boat house before his father. At times, the intensity of his competitive drive unnerved him. He couldn't stand to lose, and quitting was something his father never permitted. Quit was a word worse than "fuck" in his house.

The lights from the hotel reflected off the red hood of his Carrera, and halted the tide-like motion in his lower abdomen that he attributed to the alcohol.

The engine produced its habitual rumblings, as he slammed the car into gear. Almost fully extending his leg, Gil pressed the gas pedal lower. Like a skier attacking moguls, the car hit the speed bumps with an aggressive momentum. As he pulled into the far left hand lane, his body flattened against the seat. However, the pressure, unlike so many others, was a welcome one.

The Carrera was all his, just the way he'd dreamed of her. Whenever he sat behind the wheel, he gained perfection by osmosis — there he had no doubts. There his body was just the way he'd dreamed of it as a small boy, a man's body, just like his father's.

The sedan was a few hundred yards ahead of his car. Certain that the Carrera could go zero to sixty much faster than the BMW, Gil coaxed her to greater speeds. The red and black hoods coasted side by side for a moment, then Gil pushed his car to its limits and passed the sedan.

He hadn't questioned the move; he trusted his instincts. Nothing proved more satisfying than finely tuned instincts, and the smooth movement of an engine working near capacity.

"Are you sure you're up to this?" Gil asked as his father undressed.

"Positive, that's why I'm going first."

"Dad, you've had a lot to drink."

"If you're implying that I'm drunk, let me tell you . . ."

Gil grabbed his father's arm and said, "I just don't want us to have any more accidents. We've had enough."

"You don't think that I can still handle this, but I believe. That's enough."

His father climbed down the rocky bank of the river. Gil followed him. The water felt cold, and even though he couldn't make out the color, Gil sensed that the mud and algae floating near the surface made it murky. His father disappeared into that nameless color, first the knees, then the shoulders.

"Dad," Gil shouted before his fathers head submerged.

"What?"

"Remember to give the signal at the end of each lap."

His father disappeared, outward concentric circles the only sign that he had ever been there.

Nocturnal croakings broke the silence and marked the time. In an ordinary race, time would be marked by the swimmer's strokes, or perhaps his kick-stroke ratio. However, the feat they were attempting could not be measured by the traditional methods.

Without the rhythmic splashes, time seemed non-existent. His father seemed to have been gone for hours. Nonetheless, there were no ominous signs. Then again, he discovered no signs at all — the surface of the water as smooth as if it had never been touched.

Gil calculated the spot where his father should be, and reviewed his lifesaving skills. He imagined his father's oxygen supply diminishing, and felt his own throat constrict as if the two of them were connected. His own breath came quickly and deepened. Then he saw the signal, felt his pulse regain equilibrium.

"That's one," Gil said.

The waiting resumed. Each lap more dangerous than its predessessor, Gil doubted that his father could safely complete the one at hand.

Halfway across the river, a whirlpool interrupted the smoothness. Certain that his father was drowning, Gil tore off his clothing. He raced to the water's edge and dove in.

"Goddamn lap and a half," his father said, his head breaking the surface.

"That's not bad," Gil said, listening to the raspy sound of his father's respiration.

His father slapped him. "Don't lie to me. Failing is insult enough without that."

Gil remained in the water as his father made the motions of getting out.

"No need for you to do it now. We both know you can swim farther than I did."

Gil grabbed his shoulder and swung him around, a reversal of several childhood incidents. "No, you did your best. Now, I'm going to."

"I'm telling you, there's no reason to."

"No quitters, you told me that all my life."

"Go ahead, but I'm not watching."

Gil walked out until the water covered the white elastic of his briefs. The liquid had an unfamiliar smell and texture. Usually, the chlorine burning in his nose ignited the drive that enabled him to succeed. Slippery particles brushed his fingers as he pulled through the water, marred the smoothness of it — the perfection.

He shut out extraneous thought, picked a pace, and concentrated on eliminating wasted motion. To keep the internal pressure from building to intolerable levels, he blew spirts of bubbles out his nose. Despite his father's turned back, Gil made the signal at the end of the lap. Rules needed to be kept.

The second lap proceeded in the same catchless fashion as the first. The pressure eased without dissipating when he tried to release it. The sensation was familiar from races in which he needed to make up long gaps to win. It was not yet dangerous.

Four laps, he decided. If his father finished one and a half, then he could complete four. Anything less signified failure. He would have his 60 year old bottle of Porto, but nothing else. Swimmers were trained to exceed their own limitations. He set that goal for himself.

Again Gil issued the signal, although it wasted precious energy and oxygen.

The beginning of the third lap was a struggle. "I need air, breathe," his body commanded. "You can hold on," he told himself, "just a little longer." The pressure in his lungs mounted; they started to burn. He'd experienced that feeling before, not often, but he knew he could outlast it.

Four laps, he had to make four. His head pounded. The dizziness associated with a misplaced dive, floating without knowledge of position, consumed his concentration. There were no more physical cues, only dark waves.

"Gil, are you alright?"

The voice echoed; he thought he heard his father cheering him on. Sleep, he wanted to stop racing and close his eyes, wanted only to feel his body working near capacity, or not at all.

He breathed at a rate near hyperventilation for several minutes. When he opened his eyes, his father's face was over his.

"What a stupid stunt. You only needed to do two laps to beat me."

"I needed four, and I would have finished them, if you hadn't ruined everything."

"Ruin? I saved your life," his father said.

From the direction of the BMW, a black, pot-bellied bottle was thrown at Gil. The only prize for his victory shattered at his feet just before he reached it.

The rich red liquid ran over the glass fragments, and onto Gil's feet. When compared to the night air, the warmth of it felt like blood.

MICHAEL KILBY

# THRESHOLD

*Wherever you wait,*
*Between anticipations and regret,*
*Between the first desire and the second*
*Is but a razor of a moment, is*
*Not even time . . .*

— from "Waiting Rooms"
by Howard Nemerov

Her place was across the street and higher up than ours, so that the light always seemed to affect it in some way and alter our perceptions of it. Whether the sun shone on her porch or rose behind it in some magnificent urban eclipse, that spot appeared set apart and more prosperous than the rest of the block, at least during the day. Even that morning, as one of those light rains was beginning that can be felt but not seen, the sun drew a sharp, gleaming line around her building that threw a distinct shadow over ours. And even though Laurel was gone and my grandfather was sick, there was still something promising in that prospect, some reassurance in the sun's unchanging preference for the things that respond best to its presence.

Laurel was gone to a music camp for two weeks. Her voice was a fixture in our neighborhood and it was very seldom praised for its beauty or virtuosity because it was simply a part of our environment. It woke us up in the morning alongside the sounds of factory whistles and dogs barking and distant traffic. She reminded us that elsewhere the air was not so heavy, the horizons were not demarcated by geometric shapes, and the people were not so borne down against the land while their houses reached up to touch the sky. We noticed only that her music was clear and natural, and that it filtered down between the buildings to us like the sunlight that touched us only indirectly, glinting off of windows and dingy downspouts to lay a tenuous, multi-colored carpet at our feet.

My mother had told me to wait outside while she cared for my grandfather. The doctor said that he was simply getting old, but I knew that he had also been taken away from his home place and that he had decided never to be completely comfortable here. The only activity that I associated with the outdoors then was waiting. I thought about how I had once waited on the doorstep all night long for Laurel to turn her porch light on, but I was beginning to realize that my mother had probably carried me up to bed when it got too late. I had it in my mind that Laurel would shine some sort of beacon down to let me know we'd watch the city lights go out together. Then we'd be drawn like moths to that porch light to leave the dust of our dreams on the porch walls. But I usually just went to sleep, my hands stretched out on the rough pavement.

I looked up at the Wright's porch (Laurel's mother told me never to call it a fire escape) and remembered, as I always did, visiting there in the evenings and watching the neighborhood fade out and disappear below me. I had actually only been there once or twice, and that was several years before, but I could clearly retrace the path to her porch light, through a damp alley and up dim winding stairwells to a white room filled with light and glittering glass.

In another room was a picture of a girl waving in a great cornfield. I guessed that she was a couple of years younger than I was, only about six or seven. I thought that this was the most beautiful picture that I had ever seen or even imagined, although I never told anyone so, and often I would lie on my back on the sidewalk and pretend to be looking up through those green and yellow leaves. I would lightly touch the etched patterns on a nearby stalk (a rusted railing) that was alive and breathing and dried up and dying all at once. Because no one ever mentioned it, I never even considered that the girl in the blue print dress might have been Laurel. But I was aware that the face in the picture, blurred and distant as it was, was always more clearly wrought in my memory than the image of Laurel's face as I knew it. And whenever I tried to picture Laurel in my mind, or the one time that I suspected that I might have had a dream about her, it was that face I saw, sometimes even surrounded by miles and miles of corn.

The porch that I saw was small and furnished with a wonderfully random arrangement of broken flowerpots, hanging baskets, and misshapen gardening tools. Invisible insects whirred like distant sirens. Limb shadows danced on the gray porch walls, and all around us wind chimes clinked like ice in the long cool glass of a summer night. But my memories never took me over the edge of that terrace, and I could not envision her view of my own home between the dark railings and the leafy trellises.

I knew that my mother was massaging my grandfather's bony back while he lay grunting and squealing like an animal in his bed, coaxing life into the recesses of his loose-fitting skin and the hollows of his bones by giving up the warmth of her own hands. Sometimes she pushed hard, pumping his brittle frame as if both of their lives depended on it. Other times her fingers traced delicate patterns along his withered back, mapping out where the blood should flow to make an old man strong.

I knew that this daily exercise was good for him, and good for her, too, in a strange way. I had a great respect for my mother because of her willingness to help him. But I watched her grow weaker after each of these ordeals while my grandfather's condition seemed to stay the same. Although her determination grew along with the complexity of her technique, we all knew that he was gradually sinking out of reach, even the reach of those long, lovely fingers. For all of my awe of this undying process, I never allowed myself to touch my grandfather's hardened skin except when he appeared to have all his senses about him, and even then I was glad when he let go. And I didn't complain when my mother first asked me to wait outside during their mutual struggle against life's passing.

His skin was like the leather of a well-worn shoe. He had the tongue of a shoe also. It would flap out sometimes, dry and flimsy like a fish thrown up on the shore, and move around his face until it was a discomfort to him, until I would want to reach out and slide it back, where it wouldn't click and stutter and rub blisters on his mouth. His eyes were large and dark, set deep in his head. There was always the smell of tobacco about him, although he didn't smoke, as if he were stuffed with big brown leaves that rattled like breath through a pipe when he breathed of the early morning crackle of a campfire when he slept. When he used to whittle or grasp at my own round fleshy palms, the backs of his sprawling hands, sprung from fragile, bony wrists, would swell with veins like strong, slow-moving snakes.

His voice was brown corduroy and when he laughed it began distant and wheezing but arose as wispy and pleasant as the steam that rises from the sidewalk grates on cold mornings. Lately, however, he had changed even more. From the sounds that he made, we learned that his thoughts were troubled.

I picked up a leaf as I waited. The only tree of any importance on our street was directly across the street from her place. Its fiery leaves spread out in astral points and then cascaded to the ground in hissing silence. I would often, almost unconsciously, clutch the fragment of a leaf between my fingers and palm, rubbing it back and forth so that its network of veins would burst or split and ooze green liquid that would cling to my skin for hours. And that smell, it seemed, would never completely wash off but would linger somewhere beneath my skin like a vegetative memory. Plucking leaves was reserved for long periods of solitude and reverie. It was a form of waiting.

My inclination for rubbing leaves was due, at least in part, to the layer of grime and dust that settled onto the stunted trees on our block like so much ash from out of the burning city sky. I would brush away the dusky coating until the wax shone in all its skeletal perfection, and then invariably I would break through the seal of its skin in trying to cleanse it all the more. I remembered what we had learned in school about the disaster at Pompeii, and how my teacher had said that the beauty of it all was that death came so suddenly, while the victims were completely unprepared, making dinner or sleeping. There was something more unpleasant in this chronic, incremental settling process, something much less noble about slow death.

That night after supper, I did not go to sleep as I sat outside on the doorstep. I seemed to be in some kind of suspended state between consciousness and dream, exploring my surroundings sometimes with my eyes and sometimes with my hands which ran back and forth across the cement steps under their own power. I was neither content nor dejected, numb to the cold and the darkness, caught up in the momentum of waiting. I sensed that I was hovering somewhere between two worlds when my mother called me in.

For a long time, my grandfather had been restive and he made strange noises to himself that made me think that the inside of his head was cobbled like the surface of a puddle in a shower of rain. But that night his thoughts had begun to boil until his head was filled with black surf and he swung out wildly like he used to when he drank. He waved his arms and wailed that the snakes were crawling out from his hands and that the leaves or dark birds were swirling up from out of his soul and around and around his head. I only heard this through the door of my darkened room. But I could see it all inside my head and I wondered that my mother could so patiently move about the house while my grandfather screamed himself to pieces on his bed in the darkness.

I knew that he was dying and that there would be a dark pile that grew beside him as he lost his stuffing like his old yellow mattress gaping with holes. I sensed that there were dried leaves and feathers, and coiled snake skins and rattles, and peach pits and apple cores, all pouring out of his quivering sides. There were buckets of fragrant shavings carved from dead sticks and bits of string and bent nails. And long white bones and potatoes still clung with dirt and loose eyes. Cucumber and carrot seeds, and walnuts and eggshells, and pieces of tree-bark and the cicada shells that held onto them every

seven years. Old fishing worms and fish-scales were there, too, and straw and old-mown grass and dandelion seeds, along with rhubarb shoots and raisins and the mashed stalks of wild onions, and yellowed teeth and a rabbit's foot, and skipping stones and even a rock shaped like Alabama.

I knew then that he finally lay motionless. And that it was quiet in our house for the first time. Really quiet. It took a long time for my grandfather to learn to stay still in the city. But I wasn't upset because I was too young then to know that we couldn't shut his old skin up in a closet to pull out and dust off, to remember summer on a long day in a city without seasons.

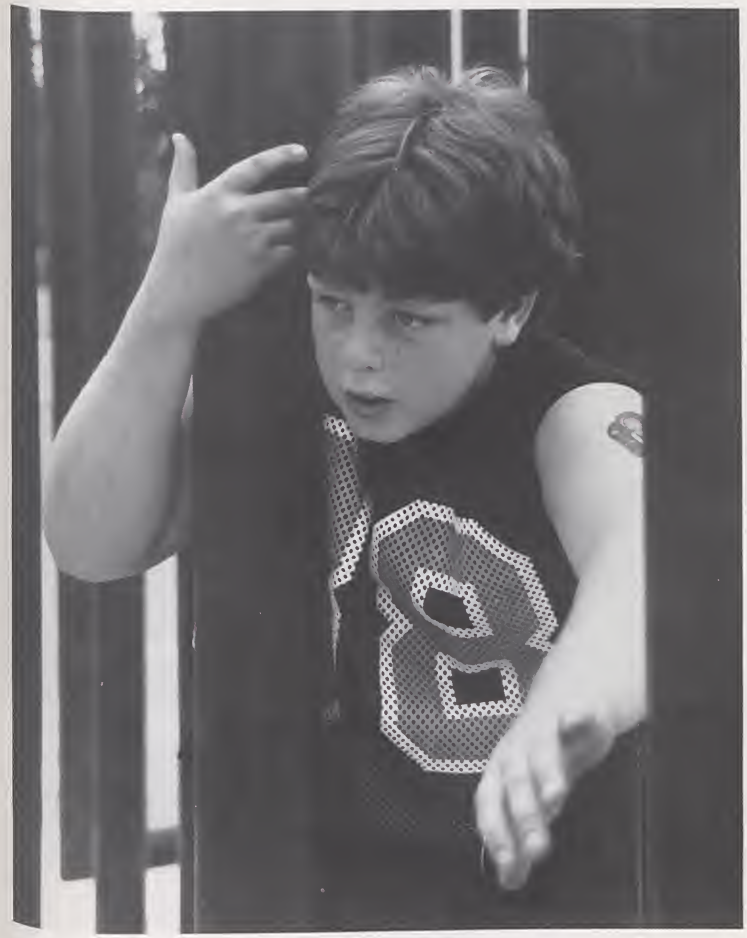
The next morning I stepped out into the bright sunlight to watch for Laurel. Somehow I could hear her voice, made more distinct by her absence, running up and down scales that knew no bounds and no theory, as if it were echoing between the tenement houses. The light was just reaching the silver gutters across the street to form a long shimmering wave that almost blinded me with its brilliance. It seemed to connect up all of the houses on the block to one another and to the morning sky, a long stream of colorful flames that flowed down the sides of the buildings and out into the street. I sat down on the glowing doorstep, face upturned and arms outstretched on the warm pavement, to hold out for a world of my own.

# *Photography*

# Elementary Eating

# Try Me

Slither



Large Boy with Tattoo on Arm

# Hey Chubs!

# Overwood

# One of the Boys

# The Wait

# The Pier

# Vacantly Occupied

# Bed and Breakfast

# Bitters and Ales

VIRGINIA GOOCH

# Where the Driver Can't See

# We've Counted Our Blessings

# Hen Goeden

Valle Crusis

# The Student

# The Student

Spring 1986

# The Student

Spring 1986


EDITORS

*Mary Elizabeth Sutton* *Mary Ellen Lloyd*

STAFF

*Kim Clark*
*Susan Earwood*
*Bonnie Flett*
*Carrie Galloway*
*David Kellogg*
*Rogan Kersh*
*Lauren Mohler*
*F. M. O'Roark*
*David Peterson*
*Richard Samet*
*Jeannie Sinclair*
*Martha Sisk*
*Sharon Stanziano*
*Sandy Sutton*

ADVISORS

*Bynum Shaw* *Lee Potter*

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# *Poetry and Fiction*

## FOR MANY DAVIDS

The blue-eyed wonderboys have
returned from the underworld.
Streaming prismatic primaries
they thwart the
brown blur and
dull leaf orange

Haze of yellow yawns
across talk of teaspoons and quartets,
blue blazon blending
evening, and exuding
graciously demure green.

Riding the enchanted rainbow,
wonderboy whisks
a captivated creature
through the needle-pricked night,
erupting red, resonant
(jesting) joy.

Quietly, dawn creeps across
grey, pulling paled primaries
into the day.
Pink precedes orange
and yellow, drawing day
into white.

Within, behind the blinds,
enchanted primaries putrefy,
regress, merge and mutate
into mud. White light
explodes and exposes
the plausible prism.

MARCELLE SMITH

## COW STORIES

I.

Can't you see they looked so perfect
standing fast asleep under the etched moon
we just had to tip them? We came up quiet
to the edge of the field and looked at them
bend with the grass, then climbed over the fence
and formed a circle. Four cows, the four of us barely ten.
At my signal we started to race, all of us,
straight for their sides, and in five short seconds
they were down, legs folding under them like lawn chairs.
We ran back and turned around to watch. The stunned cows
lay on the crushed grass and struggled to bend
their legs. Three had quick success. The fourth showed
slower recovery, but finally stood
with the rest and looked around at the field.

II.

The cows at the Agricultural Fair
were safe: we glanced into one bolted pen
to find a Hereford, lazy and rude, there
with the first of her four stomachs opened,
a porthole for our viewing pleasure. Steam pumped out hard
in tight factory beats as she shifted
her weight and swished at flies with tail and ears
and stared at the wall like a bored convict.
Bits of half-dissolved grass and stomach fluids
dribbled down her flank and onto the ground,
leaving dark tracks where they'd travelled
along the leather, while what remained down
in the hole churned in a mass of green
like clothes in a Kenmore washing machine.

III.
I dreamed a huge chorus of cows lowing together
as though they had practiced for ages,
and were just now ready to come out and perform,
maybe for the VFW, or the Elks. The trombone chord
of their voices blew so hard I awoke.
My glasses hummed on the bedside table.
Half asleep, I stumbled out: the sound
was still there, but different, more of a chant
from somewhere past the fence.
I strained into the woods, but the dark
and the thorns and the thick crowd of trees were hands
in front of my face. Then the moon broke
from its cloud and I saw a field of deep glass, and dozens
of slick frogs on its banks, their throats bulging like udders.

DAVID KELLOGG

## SHOT OF LIFE

An old man sitting
Alone on a park bench
Starts up from a nap.
Looking about slowly,
He spies children playing
Happily around him.
He smiles,
Throws his head back,
Gulps life like vodka,
And lets loose a peal of
Remembered laughter.
For a moment, he enjoys
Its pulsing warmth.
Then, unable to hold
The remnants of his youth in mind,
His head nods;
And he is asleep again.

JEFFREY. K. BEACH

## FOR MY SON, COREY, WITH LEUKEMIA

When I am so tired,
Bone-tired, deeper than bone,
The hollows of my bones
— I have birds' bones
To soar in your breath —
My very marrow aches
For beat of blood.

And now from you,
We must scoop even this,
The very marrow of your bones,
And furrow a seed spooned
From my own chest
While I lie sleeping,
My bone become your bone,
Deeper than bone,
The hollows of your bones.

You are ivory, aching like stone
In this white room,
Your breath rustling through holes
While my heart drops
To know that my aching
Will only be drawn in,
Eagerly, into those spaces,
To grow one with your own.

This is how I know.
For when I am so tired,
My blood returns to a heart of stone
Unmoving, and in my aching most,
I am most alone,
My very marrow aches
For beat of blood.

J. MICHAEL KILBY

# GLAMOUR GIRL

The main difference between 'Lizbeth Scrivner and her daughter Aurora was the little-girl pigtails 'Lizbeth wore; her shorts were always a few inches shorter, revealing buttocks a little less firm. Aurora was twelve going on twenty-one, quite a glamour girl that summer I came to know her family so well. She, like her mother, had long thick raven black hair, full of natural curl so that it bounced while she strutted around the country club pool in her leopard skin bikini. I was teaching tennis lessons that summer, so when I took hourly breaks at the club snack bar for iced-tea, I always joined the table of lingering life-guards, but I couldn't compete with Aurora and her mother. If 'Lizbeth Scrivner wasn't massaging some tired guard's back or playfully tugging at his ear, teasing him about needing a haircut, she was whispering something in Aurora's ear about "that adorable Joe Crawley" — Creepy Crawley I called him, because his hands were all over me on my first date with him and I nearly injured him for life in self-defense. Aurora always stomped off when her mother seemed to be drawing more attention than she. Poolside conversation among the boys did often revolve around who was sexier — mother or daughter — and it was generally agreed upon that though Aurora had "a better ass," 'Lizbeth had seductive eyes . . . and charisma.

The first time I babysat for the Scrivners, 'Lizbeth and her husband John were entertaining socialites with a Derby brunch before leaving for Churchill Downs. They had lots of mint juleps and a chef preparing the traditional fare — scrambled cheese eggs, ham biscuits, and grits casserole, in addition to more exotic delicacies — shrimp cocktails and lobster in drawn butter. Everyone who wasn't raving about 'Lizbeth was exclaiming over Aurora's beauty. 'Lizbeth was radiant in the limelight, as she threw back her head of glossy black hair and laughed, showing perfect white teeth. She looked smashing in black silk — outfitted by her New York designer; Aurora wore white. I was a bit surprized when 'Lizbeth handed me a list of things to be done during the day but was so in awe of the splendid estate and prominent guests that I didn't so much as glance at the monogrammed note until after they'd departed: "Wash dishes, Vacuum, Dust, Courtney's dentist appointment 2:00, Aurora needs to go to drugstore for eye-shadow, help Johny pick out new shoes for soccer, *Keep house clean* — their daddy likes it that way — Liz."

The children kissed Mrs. Scrivner goodbye and I watched one male guest nudge the lady next him with the plunging neckline, whispering, "She's quite a woman."

"Those kids just adore her," another exclaimed, "She doesn't look old enough to be Aurora's mother — My God, they're twins."

I wondered if any of the Scrivners ever got lost in their sprawling antebellum mansion. I considered jumping in the heart-shaped jacuzzi surrounded with mirrors — but the thought of seeing that many of myself in the nude frightened me. Every night must be a honeymoon for them, I thought. And the master's bed would swallow ten people. I had never before seen anything like 'Lizbeth Scrivner's kitchen, never seen four sinks full of dirty dishes.

"Honey, Bernice couldn't come in to clean today, so if you might just straighten a little . . ." she'd suggested. I never once found myself able to say no to one of her requests, though I was always reprimanding myself later on for not speaking up. But how could I speak up at money?

Cleaning that kitchen took hours, mainly because Courtney and Johny and I had a blind-folded guess-which-cereal-it-is contest, and Fruit Loops and Apple Jacks were scattered everywhere. The Scrivners had almost as many different kinds of cereals as they did cars and horses. But they were so stale Johny spat whichever kind he put in his mouth on to the counter. I must've thrown out twenty boxes of cereal — not stale because of being old, but because the Scrivners never took the time to turn the inner package down. That's why they had soggy Wheatsworth and flat Coca-Colas; they never screwed the bottle cap back on but just left them sitting.

While we were in the kitchen, Aurora was soaking in the tub with her Calgonite bubble bath, reading Harlequin Romances and eating Godiva chocolates.

"Don't tell Mom," she warned me, "I'm supposed to be on another of those diets she picked out for me."

"You're twelve years old," I cried, "What in the world does a 90 pound girl need to diet for? You're still growing!"

"Well, you see there's this gorgeous slinky evening dress at Meyer's, and if I can fit into it she'll buy it for me, with long black lace gloves to match. It's so sexy, Holly. Tell me — what do you think of my new red lipstick?"

"That's quite . . ."

"Are you dating someone? Mother says I can start dating as soon as I turn thirteen but that's too far away — don't you think? She lets me go out with some family friends, like Robbie Madden, but that's not like a real date, you know? I haven't even gotten a good night kiss cause Daddy's always waiting at the door. Maybe you'd talk to her for me and see if she'd let me go out this weekend . . . please . . . I . . ."

"Who asked you out for this weekend?" I inquired, thinking back to when I was twelve and climbed trees and played Barbie dolls and loved Tootsie Rolls and hated stupid boys.

"Kel Bruner."

"He's my age," I snapped in surprise, for I had always harbored a secret crush on Kel Bruner. "Aurora, your mother would never let you go out with a boy five years older than you — isn't there anyone your own age worth pursuing?"

"Ugh," she turned up her nose, flipping to the next page in *Cosmopolitan*. "I wanna go out with someone like this hunk — a man with hair on his chest . . . mmmmm . . . besides, Momma lets Kel come to the house to visit. The next step is to get somewhere alone with him."

For as long as I could remember, Aurora Scrivner had worn three-inch heels and three inches of make-up. She certainly didn't need it but she wouldn't be seen anywhere without it. She had been on my sister's softball team a few years back and when someone smacked the ball to right-field, Aurora had disappeared. They found her in the bathroom refreshing her blush.

Aurora informed me, that first time I babysat for her, that I was to teach her to drive. She insisted on driving the black Jaguar into town, honking at everyone and nearly crashing into McDonald's golden arches to wave at some shirtless red-necks in a big white truck. At that point, I took over and drove. I liked the attention I commanded, driving such a sleek back car, but I wasn't happy to discover the red-necks were following us, honking most obnoxiously. Aurora turned to wave, then rolled down her window and sat half leaning out, pretending to be a beauty pageant candidate. I jerked her back in the car and told her to behave like a lady.

Aurora didn't feel well that evening when we went into town for pizza, so she stayed home in bed. I was apprehensive about leaving her all alone, but she wouldn't have it any other way. It wasn't until Courtney, Johny, and I had devoured a large deep-dish pizza that I realized Mrs. Scrivner hadn't given me any money for supper, so I pulled out the $20 I had received from my grandmother for my seventeenth birthday, knowing Mrs. Scrivner would reimburse me.

"What about ice-cream?" Johny wailed. "Momma said I could get a triple scoop of peanut butter 'n chocolate tonight!"

"Momma said a triple scoop costs too much, Johny," Courtney scolded. "The most you can get is a double-dip."

Later that evening we sat in front of the bolted black gates in front of their home for nearly an hour while Courtney and Johny tried to remember the combination to open them.

"They change it every other day," Courtney whined. "How are we s'posed to remember it?" We had three obstacles blocking our way to Scrivner castle — fence, gate and lock. It was all lit up in the distance, lacking only a drawbridge. I couldn't understand why Aurora wouldn't answer the buzz.

"She must be asleep," Johny declared, determined to climb the formidable fence, when suddenly bright lights came upon us and blinded us as we looked towards them. Then Aurora appeared out of the bright splendor like Venus walking out of the sea foam. It was the white truck —and in between two hairy chests was Venus, Budweiser in hand, her parents due home any minute.

"Please don't tell Mother and Dad," she pleaded with me once we were indoors. "Those guys are good friends of mine, but they'd never approve of 'em. Please, Holly, I'll do anything if you'll help me keep this one a secret." I felt the burden of a difficult decision to make — I was disgusted with her taste, or lack of it, but at the same time it was spirit I admired because I'd never had it.

"Okay, Aurora," I submitted naively, "this time I'll forget that it happened. But don't ever put me in such a position again."

She laughed wickedly, then turned to me, "I don't care anyway. It's your word against mine and Daddy always listens to me."

Early the next morning I picked up the phone in a daze, half-asleep — I was dreaming something rather disturbing, and Aurora Scrivner was laughing in my face.

"Holly?" the voice sounded, cheerily and alert, "Liz Scrivner. Honey, I need someone to sit for the children today. I've got shopping to do in Lexington. Oh, let's see — I'll need you in just about fifteen minutes. Now Courtney has diving practice at 9:30, then y'all can get a bite to eat before Johny's swim-team practice at noon. Aurora'll be with her friends at the pool — but now, honey, you do real well in school, don't you? I was hoping you'd draw up a list of books she should be reading, classics and things. John and I were just talking the other day and we'd like for her to go someplace like Harvard or Yale to school. Now y'all can come on home from the club early in the afternoon. Courtney has her orthodontist appointment at 3:15 and she needs to be dressed cute to go in. Don't let Johny go in the office with bare feet. He likes to be back by 4:00 to watch "Scooby Doo." Y'all can go uptown for dinner — the children said they wanted Long John Silver's for supper."

Without realizing what I was doing, I found myself eagerly agreeing with every instruction she gave me, knowing full well that my Dad needed our car for the day and Momma was counting on me to help out in the garden. When I explained to Daddy that I could really use this chance to earn some extra money, he was more than willing to ride his bike and allow me to provide taxi service for the Scrivners. Besides, as I told him, they'd be paying me for yesterday, too. I suppose even then I knew they wouldn't pay me — but something attracted me to them. I seemed to take on a new identity when I was the Scrivner's sitter.

Aurora was queen of Arlington Country Club that day; I brought her my copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, but she rather carelessly tossed it aside and I realized it was too old for her. I couldn't quite see her identifying with Elizabeth Bennett anyhow. She switched from her leopard skin suit to her turquoise maillot to her skimpiest satiny white. She never once got in the water, but made at least ten trips to the snack bar (past the lifeguards) and received ten telephone calls at the front desk —all from boys, she informed me. She pouted when I wouldn't let her drive to the orthodontist. After Courtney's checkup, the secretary presented me with the bill, much to my dismay. As I tried to

explain that I was only the impoverished babysitter of this jet-setting clan, Dr. Greer overheard and settled matters quickly — "Scrivner, taken care of," he said sternly. I had always been in awe of Dr. Greer before, but now somehow felt a sense of superiority. I flung my head back and laughed like Liz Scrivner did. I knew he'd kept braces on my teeth an extra six months just so he could get a new couch.

Johny and I were stretched out on the carpet watching "He-Man," dipping spoons in crunchy peanut butter and sticking chocolate chips in it when Courtney came running in crying, "Aurora, what happened to Wookie?"

The fluffy terrier sauntered in bashfully, whelping and whining. Courtney swept him up in her arms; the poor dog's hair had been hacked off unevenly, bloody nicks and scissor scrapes covering his little body. Aurora descended from her purple bedroom when she heard all the commotion downstairs.

"Why'd you do it again, 'Rora?" she asked in broken sobs, a tear rolling down her flushed cheeks. "Momma told you it wasn't funny the first time you cut his hair like this. Why'd you do it?" Her cries were muffled as she buried her face in Wookie's tattered coat.

"I think it's hilarious," Aurora laughed nervously, "I don't know why, but it's so funny! Look at that stupid dog!"

Courtney stared at her older sister doubtfully, shaking her head, "I don't understand you sometimes," she said softly, "just like with those chickens when we were little."

"What chickens?" Aurora demanded. Then, with an intuitive flicker in her eyes, she responded, "Oh, the Easter chicks. I'd forgotten about 'em. Daddy gave us every color, didn't he? They'd been dyed orange, green, pink, and blue — they were so adorable, weren't they . . . in those baskets full of jelly beans, so cute and cuddly. Made you just wanna hug 'em and squeeze 'em and squeeze 'em . . ."

"You did squeeze them to death," interrupted Courtney, "but why didn't you stop after you squoze yours to death? Why'd you have to squeeze mine to death too?"

"I dunno," Aurora spoke slowly as if lost in a dream. "They were just so cute and so cuddly," she grinned, "and I loved 'em so much. Gosh, that was funny. I mean I never really meant to hurt 'em. I couldn't believe I killed the first one. Then I just kept squeezing til they all died. I kinda wanted to see if one of 'em might be stronger than the others — if one of 'em might fight back." I shuddered.

Liz Scrivner didn't have her checkbook with her that night when she arrived home three hours later than expected with bags and boxes of new clothes for Aurora. She assured me she'd pay me for the last week and gas money on Sunday if I could just stay over the weekend with the children while she and John went to the lake. I had learned that it was not within my power to say no to Liz Scrivner, and so I willingly conceded. I never told my mother they didn't pay me; she would never understand why I continued to put up with it. I didn't understand it myself, attributed it to my morbid fascination with the life of the wealthy.

The following week when Liz Scrivner called me to babysit for her, she needed for me to pick up several things for Aurora's thirteenth birthday surprise party. She sent me to Kroger with a list a mile long, told me to charge it; they weren't very receptive to a $200 charge even if it was Liz Scrivner's. I picked up balloons, flowers, and some of Mr. Scrivner's freshly dry-cleaned shirts — all on charge, which meant I received a lot of frowns and unintelligible murmurs. I suspected I wasn't the only person the Scrivners owed for services rendered.

When I arrived at the house, Liz Scrivner wrinkled her forehead and knitted her dark brows in obvious displeasure.

"Those flowers — I don't care for the way they're arranged. You'll have to take them back. Tell them I wanted the white roses in the middle, honey. Liz Scrivner sent you." This I did with some hesitation. The florists were trying to prepare wreaths for a funeral and didn't have time to be bothered with such trifles, but upon hearing Scrivner, they were quick to make the desired changes. I was beginning to learn how satisfying it could be to have people snap to attention in my presence. It was nice not having to stand in line.

I drove back out to the house, only to have Mrs. Scrivner tell me she'd changed her mind about the balloons. The orange balloons were "too busy" she declared, "They clash with my couch . . . let's have blue, honey — you're such a dear to take care of all this for me."

I received another sigh of disgust from the counter girl at Brenda's Balloons and Dolls. I'd never liked her; she was one of Kel Bruner's crowd — the cheerleaders and football players who turned up their noses at teachers' kids. She complained they'd soon be going out of business and showed me a paper with charges over $150 to the Scrivner family, then begrudgingly produced the requested blue balloons. I felt I was going to apologize my life away if I had to ask for one more "special favor." However, this was my turn to deliver the snub.

I arrived back at the house to find several recipes awaiting me on the pink kitchen counter, and a note asking me to go ahead and prepare the birthday fixings since Mrs. Scrivner had been called earlier than expected to Lexington. She phoned an hour later to make sure I'd understood her directions; she also needed me to tie ribbons on the trees leading up to the house and make posters saying HAPPY BIRTHDAY AURORA. And of course a cake had to be baked and decorated.

I wasn't among the guests at Aurora's party that night; I was completely exhausted and had had quite enough of the Scrivner family for a while. It was funny how I never noticed how many special requests and favors they asked when I was there among them but when I'd drive home, I'd start thinking about how different it was to babysit for them than for anyone else.

They said Aurora looked twenty-five on her thirteenth birthday; everyone was celebrating the contract she had signed with Farrah Fawcett Cosmetics to do some modeling and advertising. Her face, unlike Courtney's, was perfect — not a scrape or a scar, porcelain white skin with fluttering dark thick lashes. Courtney had a gash on her face that would be there for life. When she was younger, she'd told me, Aurora told her to get under the see-saw while Aurora and her cousin see-sawed for what seemed hours. She kept asking when she could get up, but Aurora kept saying just a few more minutes; "Can't you take it?" As soon as Courtney tried to get up, the wood smacked her right in the face — twenty-two stitches and a bloody mess.

That next summer, my father led my family on a literary pilgrimage through all of New England, from the homes of Herman Melville and James Fenimore Cooper to Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson. My favorite place was Walden Pond — its sacred waters were peaceful, tranquil and rejuvenating. We spent the entire afternoon reveling in solitude, "inebriate of air." Then we discovered the small patch of fresh earth upon which Thoreau built his simple abode so he could "get at the meanness of life," suck the marrow from the bone.

When we got home I received news of the accident over the phone; I was stunned as I hung up the receiver. The day my family had spent at Walden Pond, Aurora and some of her friends had crashed in a jeep. The young driver died instantly; Aurora was in a coma, had been ever since she shot up through the canvas top of the jeep and landed by the side of the road. I hurried to the hospital; they weren't allowing visitors, but Courtney and Johny were playing by themselves in the waiting room and I joined them.

"Can you take us to McDonald's?" Johny asked me, "I'm starving."

We waited for Mrs. Scrivner to come out; Courtney said she'd been by Aurora's side for five days and nights, hadn't slept a wink. That was apparent from her appearance. Her warm brown eyes had become cold and sore, red with irritation and the dark circles under them were like caverns. She was pallid and fatigued. "I used to think I was a very lucky person," she told me, "but if Aurora doesn't come out of this I will never have faith again."

The next day, Aurora came out of the coma, faintly recognizing her mother and father. The first thing Liz Scrivner taught her was putting on her make-up. The nurses were amazed. Here was a child who would have to learn to write and to walk all over again and putting on blusher was a reflex for her — she did it with ease.

Aurora's recovery was slow; they brought in physical therapists and all sorts of specialists and tutors after she was well enough to be transferred to Fern Hill Children's Hospital. My sister and I went to see her everyday, often took her favorite — Tollhouse cookies. Her room was brightly decorated with all kinds of posters, stuffed animals and flowers from important people, of course. They said her stubborn and impatient behavior was a result of some slight brain damage — and yet I never remembered Aurora being anything but stubborn and impatient. Her temper flares and wicked laugh were both attributed to the accident; everyone seemed to think Aurora Scrivner had worn some sort of halo before. I knew better.

While I was away at school, I received weekly letters from my sister informing me of the latest Scrivner family happenings. Small towns like ours sizzle with juicy scandal in the frying pan. Aurora had been temporarily expelled from school after she was discovered in a dorm room with a college boy when she should have been in her chorus class; her friends squealed on her because they were worried about her, little suspecting what would be discovered.

"It's all because of the accident," my sister tried in vain to convince me over the phone.

"She's always been that way," I thought to myself. "Aurora Scrivner was never an angel, though her head has always been in the clouds."

"She has become as wild as that black pony she used to ride so fearlessly," my sister continued. "You'd never believe they let a Scrivner carry on like that — she sneaks out with boys six and seven years older, and her father always chases 'em down. They keep saying they're sending her away to an academic prep-school."

"Sounds like Mrs. Scrivner has finally had all she can take," I answered, "no more Bobbsey twins . . . That's how she's always wanted it; she had a training bra on Aurora at seven years old, heels on her before she reached ten. Maybe she'll realize her mistake and decide to let Courtney and Johny be children. Aurora skipped a whole phase; she missed dirty tennis shoes and mud pies and jeans with knees worn out and patches, and campfires and hide 'n seek because her mother was always getting her pretty for some occasion, dressing her to look ten years older than she was."

Christmas-time my sister and I always looked forward to baking gingerbread men, pressing plump raisins in the dough for buttons and nose, then frosting them with pink. We delivered platefuls of gingerbread boys and girls to family friends, and we included the Scrivners on our list. Liz Scrivner looked paler than I'd seen her before; her streaked blush didn't blend in with her ghastly complexion. Aurora was very much overweight; she grabbed at the cookies, stuffing them in her mouth impulsively. Her mother shook her head, fumbling with a dangling earring. She thanked me graciously, then paused.

"Holly, I'd always hoped Aurora would be more like you. That's why I always had you sit for us, honey. Are you dating someone down at school?"

It was hard to remember that time in my life when I'd been almost envious of their wealth and lifestyle. I told her I had two crushes, but my schoolwork was keeping me busier than I'd ever imagined.

"I wanted you to be a role model for Aurora," she said with a sigh, "I just don't understand why it didn't work."

I couldn't believe it when I heard they were suing the family of the girl who had died in the car accident. She had been the driver and they weren't going to forget it. I wondered what good more money could possibly do them. As far as I was concerned, it had already done enough damage. Aurora Scrivner was going to spend the rest of life in a Calgonite bubble, reading Harlequin Romances, never settling for anything but Godiva chocolates.

## RESURRECTION

What is there? he asked,
but there were too many textures,
and he touched the hamburger wrapper and the leather of the book
and they both felt the same.
Outside, sun blazed and danced between the leaves,
and the children were alive and running and laughing,
but as distant as the hum of the chainsaw.
Harsh outlines, ruler markings in a garish picture book
crossed, jumbled as the puzzle pieces under the sofa cushion.
Salami, Oreos, fizzy glass bottles, sharp flavors that remain, not penetrating.
The box buzzes of war, they are starving, Peter, an island washed away today and there is radiation in the lake.
Be saved! But the sky pushes down, the people groan and the hens cackle and the hands on the clock click forward.
She is touching him, and she smiles, and he sees the big open eyes,
and her face blurs but is still there,
and he feels it.
The chainsaw fizzles, and is silent, the light softens
She loves me
And the children are laughing.

MARTHA SISK

## AN AMERICAN FRONTIER LOVE AFFAIR

My voice might as well be the Pony Express
for all the speed
with which my "I love you, too" travels.
We're back in the Wild West,
where untamed America assaults my messenger
with flash floods — dust storms —
black bandana bandits —
before you hear hoofbeats
then a polite knock at your door.
Bedraggled,
but struggling to be gallant,
my three-day-old whisper tips its Stetson
and reminds you to send your reply
by the next fast stagecoach.
I'm already waiting.

DONNA BOWMAN

## 1964

When they were 27
our mothers danced in the kitchen
to the white noise of Kenmore washers.
The radio remained silent:
they didn't understand the music trapped inside
& every time it was let out
hysterical notes sprayed like black paint
on their unsullied refrigerators.
But through the miracle of Modern Technology
sound waves lapped quietly, filling their bones
& their nostrils  their stomachs
round with babies.

In 1964
white-haired, black-eyed, high queen
of the amphetamine Edie Sedgewick
was Girl of the Year
& our mothers were dropping babies
like bombs.

As they were wheeled into the delivery room
people outside moved in day-glo dances
through black & white & polythene streets.
Inside, the hospital was a dream
of sterile machines humming like washers
that had been going around forever.

When blank-faced nurses brought in trays of pills
and told them soon they would feel nothing
our mothers:  did they wonder
at the eternity of zero
as little legs jazzed in their bellies?

F. M. O'ROARK

## ON PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM

I saw the plate when I was small
among my grandmother's things
man in cravat holding christening-gown baby
Daguerreotype, she called it.
I used to stare at the baby's face
powder-white with milk-bland eyes.

I found out later the baby was dead
even in the picture
and I could not look at it anymore
The man's face became unfocused
lost and obscured with pain
the silk-striped noose tightening
around his neck with each swallow
of disbelief.

and I was intruding

Some precious vapours
should never be entrusted to metal
Some plates
should never be developed

Retina poet's camera
Take some of my images with you
when you go.

JANE E. DUNLAP

To speak
It
would be
to open
clogged arteries,
to let blood
gush

So It
is better
left
to clot
at heart,
to block all
passage.

BARNSLEY BROWN

## GRAFFITI

an angry hand
was compelled to write
in
indelible green
on the
station wall —
Godzilla
is King
of the
Monsters.

GINA GRUBBS

## LOVE POEM

I'm so afraid
when I'm waiting
for you
and inside I feel that worm
crawl down the tracks through my bones
assuring me that someday the phone will ring
or I will see a figure, perhaps my father,
come like a shadow into my house to tell me.
So what can I do but go back
into your bachelor's room
and close the door
on the dark hall behind me,
turn to the left into the spicy bathroom
where your razor lies
dull and crusted with last night's
shaving cream.
There's a drawer there
I slide open and fumble through
to find those plaster of Paris models of your teeth
you got five years ago at the dentist's
and think of the first time you brought them out,
jaundiced and clacking and set them
beside your brown cheek
to make me laugh,
when August was too hot
to swing in the hammock —
I set them out when I'm waiting for you
and stare at them knowing
I'd come in here and get them
if they told me
you were never coming back.

GINA GRUBBS

# THE WAITING

A frigid northeasterly wind howled through the rafters of an intimate manger, where a gentle Babe was nestled in a makeshift cradle of hay and tenderly wrapped in swaddling clothing. His fragile fingers would not grow cold, for He was surrounded by the Blessed Virgin, solemnly adorned in a simple robe, and Joseph, the humble shepherd who tended to the Young One with the same compassion and steadfastness he practiced with his flock. The goodwill of the Magi, the three wise men graciously offering gifts to the newborn Babe, generated a warmth, a comforting air so wonderful that a feeling stirred in the Baby Jesus which welcomed the newness of their world. Occasionally, errant snowflakes fluttered upon the manger, the still-life of an impending Christmas season.

"What a crock of shit!" the prophet spat at the church's annual Nativity creche, pacing up and down the breadline that snaked along the sidewalk; he searched the sullen eyes and the hungry faces that waited single file to find a trace of life but found nothing, except a somber morose, a silent gloom. He then cursed the idyllic plaster figures arranged so handsomely across the avenue with a bitter hatred; it was an intense abhorrence equal only to that directed at those waiting patiently for some weak soup and a few stale crackers which might never come. "These hollow men," he sneered, "would stab their own blood in a heartbeat to get a little more! Makes a man sick to be of the species!"

With a pretentious air to his bearing, he lowered himself onto a concrete stairway, crumbling beneath him from neglect and decay, to prophesize to anyone who would listen; he assumed the squatting posture of an inspired oracle, a dignified Socrates, an omniscient Buddha. A handful of hollow men, who were waiting aimlessly at the end of the line, gathered around to hear his words of truth — a horde of believing disciples who would not talk but would only listen to the man. The assembly stood in stark contrast to the Babe in the manger and His wise men across the way.

He chewed on a toothpick and closed his eyes tight as if to summon all his resources he needed to relate his tale. With a meditated sigh, he began: "The waiting paralyzes us all. It relegates, corrodes the strongest of our species into meek, brooding beings who perish slowly in their own inner furnace. I, being impartial you see, cannot refute that our precious time can be manipulated on occasion, beyond our reasonable control; this, my friends, is unavoidable, for the three spinsters of fate have decreed so. But we must dedicate ourselves to conquer all which is within our reach. Anyhow, I personally have transcended the eternal wait, battling it with endless patience, a sort of steadfastness I invite you to find. You too must overcome this dark enemy — for it atrophies the one who idly accepts the wait thrust onto him by another, forcing him to degenerate into a lower form of being. Those who stand in lines such as these surely perpetuate their own unhappiness, for they are incarcerated in a prison of their own undoing, decomposing in their own fury."

The prophet pronounced his sentiments with relish, dictating carefully-selected words which would certainly pierce the hollow hearts of the men languishing in such a predicament. "Gracie," he began, "a respectful indigent attired in a motley garb, resembling a harlequin — covered with bright patches all over, red, yellow, green, patches on the elbows, on the knees, on the back —impatiently stuffed her worn hand down into a homemade canvas boot, and emptied the contents onto the tiled floor of the Port Authority. You know, the one over in midtown by the tunnel."

The disciples, cognizant of the warm haven where they had all spent at least a few cold nights, nodded; the prophet's eyelids had not opened, but committed to a deep concentration, he resumed: "Glancing about with a suspicious look in her eye, she quickly sifted through the newspaper wrappings, the odd pieces of soiled felt and cotton, and matchbook covers so deftly as

not to allow someone to pounce upon her precious boot; she continued to repack the pitiful thing with a fierce swiftness so that her naked toes would not freeze in the meantime. It was, as I remember, an unusually frigid night in Manhattan and the patrolmen were ordered to hustle everyone indoors. Everyone, I mean, without a place in the world. Gracie, though, was determined to survive, at least long enough until her son came to bring her back to Jersey for a hot turkey dinner with all trimmings.

" 'Whatcha lookin' at, punk? You'se perverts betta mind ya own damn business or I call dem cops!' Gracie shouted across the lobby to the fashion beau and his sexy belles, who were hawking their bodies for a restroom thrill at a bargain price. The sharp-looking daddy took a wooden toothpick out of his mouth, snarled a vulgar remark to the baglady, and smiled reassuringly to his girls. No need to beat some sense into some has-been bitch, absolutely no need, he thought as one of his whores flipped her middle finger into the air to the indignant harlequin.

" 'Go ta hell, ya bums . . . yas all up ta no good!'

" 'I'm good, honey — real good. Try me?' one of his sugar-coated lassies offered, but the wrinkled old lady with the matted black hair responded by packing her other boot even more feverishly. As she sat on the floor amid her bundles stuffed with rags and trinkets of her destitution, apathetic passersby turned and muttered 'Now ain't that such a shame' and 'That's exactly what happens when you do naughty things' among themselves, the fortunate, as they eyed her makeshift clothing speckled with grease and grime: scotch tape here, a nail there, glue here, all fastened together by yarns or string.

"And as if it were customary, she promptly gathered up her soiled shopping bags, heaping with papers and rags of all sorts, and hustled over to the young black muscian leaning against the ticket window.

"The minstrel shook his head in disgust as Gracie approached. 'Their souls are starved, Miss Gracie,' he said, nodding towards the pimp and his girls. 'It's awfully disappointing to see desolation in young eyes like theirs. Black, white — makes no difference, my friend. They are hungry 'cause their hearts are empty. Hunger of that kind knows no color.' He fingered the brass keys of his battered trumpet as he came to that realization. He thought about it for a while, then looked at the miserable old lady who seemed to have just stepped out of a troupe of mimes.

" 'So, how ya'll doin' today, Miss Gracie?' he said.

" 'Oh, ya know the routine. Somedays rough, some easy. At this age can't really tell. My son's gonna turn twenty-seven next week. Some kid, I'll tell ya — and handsome and good wit the girls jest like his ole' man — kept my hands full when he was a toddler. He's gonna pick me up in the station wagon — it's a red one, ya know — and we's gonna cross the river to Jersey wit all dem noisy kids of his and have a turkey dinner wit all the fixin's and me and dose kids are gonna bust wide open 'cause we's got too full and 'cause we's laughin' too hard, and we's gonna fall asleep watchin' the set, jest like I used ta.'

"The street musician paused, and then started to play a mournful dirge that echoed down the empty caverns of the terminal, shaking anything loosely fastened; it built up into a bold message as the sounds worked their way into a wayward conscience . . ."

The prophet stopped his narrative for a moment, and cleared his throat with a deliberate slowness, acting as if he would not mutter another word if he had a mind to. His hungered disciples surrounding him on all sides were feasting on every syllable of his gospel.

"Well, for one thing, time for Gracie only seemed abstract. That, my friends, saddens every man's heart in some small way because it's a universal affliction. Time was fixated at a point for her, suspended, imprisoned in a worldly dimension where spatial matters were insignificant. And the musician knew that. 'Sit down beside me here old lady and wait!' he would think. 'Await the Lord for His Second Coming! Wait for the end!' Thoughts like these filled his mind as he observed his pathetic companion.

"The lone black man with the trumpet waited, too, don't be mistaken. The Lord, magnificently draped in a virgin white robe and adorned with a pitiful crown of thorn, was about to step off one of those buses with a suitcase in hand, maybe from Memphis, from Pittsburgh, from beyond the sun. It didn't matter from where or when because the man knew — yes, he knew and he believed — that He would come and that the Second Coming was imminent. So every day he played upon his trumpet with nimble fingers as travelers flipped coins of homage into his pail, filling his coffer of gold to present to the Babe. See those wise men across the street in the manger? They overcame their struggle; they followed their star and found their redemption. But that is just plaster, carved or molded out of human hands. Do you see that? Our musician is still this moment following his star, just like the wise men, but as tragedy is cousin to this life, he is a servant to his dreams, and, I'm afraid to say, the covenant made to him by his god will be unfulfilled. But enough of this! The musician worked with the humility of a common laborer punching the clock, with the manner of an executive arriving at the office early, with the dignity of a Secretary of State; the man clad in a torn sweater and faded jeans serenaded the blind and uncaring beings in three-piece suits, those ignorant of the momentous occasion.

" 'Sometimes,' he said to Gracie, in a bitter tone, 'I look at these faceless beings — always in a hurry to get here or there, not knowing where they came from or where they're goin' — and I begin to wonder. Why are we here? What is the meaning of it all? This is a lifeless life, sterility without serenity! Do you understand me?'

"Gracie just stared blankly at him; she was busy painting a perfect picture in her mind of her son's home, of the exact set-up of the gleaming silverware, of the engraved gravy ladle that would pour forever and never stop. There would be smiling faces around the table affirming their thankfulness in prayer; there would be cups with her initials on the brim and made of gold, and a happiness that would never end until they all fell asleep, stomach crockful, heart content.

"The musician sat down on his milk crate, his trumpet gingerly propped upon his knee. Without a reason, he burst full-force into another emotional number. His muscular forearms pulsated with energy through the veins stenciled on his skin, and his entire body swayed in rhythm to his music. The tune he played was constant and brief, but his own inner happiness eternal. He was announcing the Coming. It would be any moment and he found solace from his impoverishment in this duty.

"And so there the two souls passed away their time, waiting, decaying, dreaming empty dreams. They are the breathing dead. They, like the rest of you, are still waiting in blind faith for something that will never come. It suspends their time with their ignorance. You all are blind to the eternity of time.

"My friends, I can illustrate your condition, borrowing an account taken by Montesquieu, or maybe Camus — I forget the one actually — anyhow, the Holy Spirit descended down into the dark and flaming quagmire of hell. He observed the multitudes of heathen sinners being tortured for their evil; the acrid smell of burning flesh stung his eyes for a moment and then he saw an evil vulture swoop down and pluck the eyes out of an agonizing sinner, and He was pleased. This will be you — imagine it! One sinner cried out in intense pain and begged how long this torture would last.

The Holy Spirit replied with a sense of justice, and I do believe He was just, 'I will descend upon the earth every millennium with a dove's feather. Crossing over the land, I will brush the landscape once but no more. When the earth as you have known it is reduced to the size of a marble, eternity will have just begun!' "

The prophet intoned these words with such a finality that he paused a moment as to let the tremendous impact ebb slowly away from his audience. "Here my friends," he concluded, "in this timeless hell, you will languish in the horror, the filth of your undoing, waiting for a time that will never begin."

"What became of Gracie and the musician? What the hell was the point of all that? Isn't there an ending?" one of the disciples challenged.

"There, my friends, you have it. Precisely." The prophet had spoken. He would not utter another syllable. His eyes opened and sparkled as he finished his message, and was quite satisfied with his rendition.

As the smells of the kitchen teased their commitment, the legions of true believers soon dissipated, betraying the prophet's gospel of hopelessness for weak soup and a plateful of greasy chops. The rag-tag crew, with the same manner they had gathered, retreated to the soupline, faithful for a reward for the waiting. The prophet stared contemptuously at the tender Babe in the manger surrounded by the faithful and spat. He wandered on, unfulfilled, convinced he had overcome the wait. Deep inside, his heart yearned for a star to follow; but for now, he would settle for anyone who had the time to listen.

## 30 MILES IN

You're in front of Memory's Plaza
in Whiteville, NC.
It's Saturday and you're
not quite to the beach
watching a Jehovah's witness carry a box
of fried chicken across the intersection
in front of your car.
Before the light changes,
you look across the right lane
to the New Hope Baptist Church of the True Gospel
of Jesus Christ Our Lord
and see handmade curtains in the new bathroom there.
The lady who made the curtains
is standing inside looking at what
she's done,
fingering the cotton hem
and peeping out at
an old bathtub gleaming
beyond the picnic tables
by the road where you're
itching for green,
smelling dead fish
already in the air
30 miles in.

GINA GRUBBS

## ATECHNOLOGICAL BLUES

My brother was a test tube baby
My sister's an experimental clone
I'm the only nonsynthetic human being on the block
And lately I've been feeling all alone

I met a girl who said she'd come from Venus
I tried to make her let me take her home
The only thing that ever came between us
Was her daddy's artificial aerodome

If I could only learn to deal with science
If I could only work my picturephone
But the voice on the line is none other than mine
And the only face I see is my own

T. WARD KITCHIN

## BEFORE THE NEW YEAR

Tired of piercing music and pointless celebration
I go the quick round of apologies, shake
twenty right hands, and make the final drive
to Don's house. His mother
is at the door, waiting, her round
Italian body sketched in black against
the blue light. "Don's on the sofa,
maybe sleeping, you wake him up,
nobody come by tonight." I see
her eyes, dark and glazed,
I see she's waiting for me, for anyone,
and when she finishes with the Coke and the ice
she'll go back and lean against the jamb
and stare out into the empty road
until midnight.

In the TV room
Mr. Vucci and Gina nod, smile, turn
back to the screen. Don and his blanket
breathe together like a seal
on a ledge, drying in the winter sun.
I sit on the floor until Mrs. Vucci
plods in, Coke in hand, and jiggles
Don awake. He smiles weakly
but doesn't speak, and I sit where his head was.
In a minute he's asleep again, his bloated face
like a baby in my lap, and I smooth
what's left of his hair, hold his head
to my body, and sing lullabies.

We wake together
to the Vuccis and the TV counting
down . . . we watch the ball descend
over Times Square, over twenty thousand
upturned faces, eyes wide, mouths open, see the clock
at the corner of the screen, see its three
arms click together and the grey globe
shiver and blaze white.

DAVID KELLOGG

## EASY LIFE

Beware of quilts;
They are made for hiding!
Beneath them children escape their destiny,
And ignore the quickening steps of their fate.
Carefully woven patterns of thought protect the
Hopeless caterpillars from their little fears
(The big fears though know how to creep in around the corners,
Even if the poor fuzz-balls pull the edges beneath them
And sit on them with all their might.)
Soft barriers crush would-be butterfly wings;
And flowers of might have been, without sun, die on their dungheaps.
Thick quilts deaden noise and console trembling minds.
They coddle and coo to their victims, soothingly, senselessly.
In these patchwork time machines,
Unthinking minds are transported to warmer regions
Where they need not worry about survival,
Where they can throw down their work of thought
And slip into comfortable remembrances of other days.
But, even here on the sunny beaches of memory they remain numb,
Frozen past caring by the chill winds of life.
Beneath the quilts is safe and warm —
For a while.
But soon the seamstress death creeps in
Carrying her pincushion, sleep,
To begin the quilts anew.
She discards the empty shells of men
And drapes their once protecting quilts
Over others who wish to hide,
Over others who wish to find life smooth,
And smothered . . .
And smothered . . .
Smothered inside layers upon layers of darkness
While life mourns and paces outside.

JEFFREY K. BEACH

On a stool in a bar
with decorated metal on his jacket
a young man
imposed home
  over the nonsense words and tingling music,
  over the victories resting around him in the bunk
  a soft body, lemonade, warm summer evenings with the crickets,
on and on

On a porch in the setting sun
with the crickets' unvarying song
a young man
imposed adventure
  over the melting ice and crying baby,
  over the gentle hands resting near him in the fresh sheets
  trumpets blaring, glorious homecomings, the click of cameras,
on and on

The black night opened and enveloped two cries,
one soft and restrained
one deep and unharnessed
in haunting harmony
on and on

MARTHA SISK

## SWALLOWING

I sketched them deep
with gritty forefinger
before tides poured
forth like tears
sloshing in sandy burrows
heaving tufts of kelp

Still
a sandmite hovered
floating
over waters
until three words
soaked and faded
into beach.

BARNSLEY BROWN

# PRIDE, PREJUDICE, AND PECAN PIE

Bingham H. Braniff III was quite a bit early for his morning appointment. He had purposely left his condominium early that morning to insure that he could find Hornsby Hollow in plenty of time to make his call. At the time he had left home he wasn't even sure where Hornsby Hollow was, but the road sign he had just passed convinced him that it wasn't much further.

Hornsby Hollow — the name alone made Bing laugh. "Sounds like the original home of the Beverly Hillbillies," he had told his boss when his boss had called to tell him about the sales call he was to make there. His boss had replied, "I don't care if it's Ma and Pa Kettle's hometown and they're both axe murderers; we have a potential customer there and you are going to make the damn call."

The potential customer to whom Bing's boss referred was a farmer who was interested in the possibility of buying a computer to help run his business. Marstran Computers, Bing's employer, had had very poor luck selling computers to farmers. That was in part the reason why Bing resented being sent to make the call. The main reason was simply that Bing hated farmers. Not only that, Bing hated farms. He hated cows. He hated pigs. He hated horses. Bing had even hated having to sing "Old MacDonald" when he was a child. He found the whole rural scene quite loathsome and distasteful. There was, in his opinion, just far too much in the way of bad odors, bad breeding, and polyester for a civilized human being to tolerate. Unfortunately for Bing though, he was the youngest salesman Marstran had, so he got the business no one else wanted — the sale in Hornsby Hollow being an apt example.

Bing squinted his eyes tightly behind his sunglasses, scanning the road ahead for the intersection that would be his turn-off. Just then he spotted it and began to gently apply his brakes. He eased up to the intersection and looked at the sign which pointed to his left and read "Hornsby Hollow 14." Bing chuckled at the little green sign thinking that buying that sign was probably all that the U.S. Department of Highways had ever done for Hornsby Hollow and that even that was more than a little "toadsuck" town like that deserved. He shook his head and looked down the road to his right. All he could see was overgrown meadow and an old barn. He swivelled his gaze around to the left and noticed the diner that was just across the intersection from him.

The diner was an old square building with a flat roof, made out of cinder blocks which were now only partially covered by peeling white paint. On either side of the building's facade was a large window with drawn blinds. There was a screen door between them and above it, a long sign that read "Enjoy Coca-Cola" at each end and "Ladonna's Diner" in the center. There was also something else written on the sign, but at first Bing couldn't make it out. He eased his sunglasses down to the tip of his nose and peered over the top of them at the faded inscription. It said "Best Pecan Pie in the World."

Bing glanced at his watch and then at the little green sign that was the Highway Department's tribute to Hornsby Hollow. "An hour and a half to go fourteen miles." thought Bing. "This could be the last place I've got to kill some time."

He glanced again at the door to the diner and for the first time he saw the hand painted sign that said "Come On In, Were Open". He read it again and laughed. "Were Open," he said, shaking his head. "Is that the same as 'now closed?' Isn't there an apostrophe missing in there somewhere? Aren't you hicks required to go to school?"

He looked at his watch one more time, pushed his glasses back up to the bridge of his nose, pulled down on his turn signal lever, put the car in gear, and turned into the parking lot of Ladonna's Diner. When the car was as close to the building as Bing cared to be, he pulled up the parking brake, turned off the ignition, got out of the car, and locked the door behind him. As the door closed he noticed what a good mirror the driver's window made in the morning sun, so he took the

opportunity to straighten his overly moussed hair and the fifteen dollar tie for which he had paid twenty-five dollars at his favorite clothier. Once he thoroughly convinced himself of the quality of his wardrobe and grooming, he turned toward the door to the diner and started to enter.

Just as his foot touched the one and only step leading up to Ladonna's Diner, he noticed the newspaper machine on the other side of the stoop. He walked over to the machine and bent over to examine its contents, which would have been the latest issue of the "Knoxville News Sentinel" if he had been there a day earlier, but which was now only yesterday's "Knoxville News Sentinel" which he had already read thoroughly, or at least as thoroughly as he ever read a newspaper. Nevertheless, it still represented an opportunity to spend some money, so Bing put in his quarter, pulled the knob, took out his brand new copy of yesterday's paper, turned around, and walked in the diner.

The interior was about what one would expect after viewing the exterior. Along the left hand wall were a series of booths; the seats were covered in red vinyl and the table tops in a light patterned formica that looked to be out of the fifties. It was the kind of formica pattern that hid ketchup and coffee spills and ruined the sleeves of your suit when you were careless enough to rest them on it. On the right side of the room was a long bar, covered in the same patterned formica, with a row of stools covered in the same red vinyl and mounted to the floor by steel posts. Behind the bar was the grill, the long waist-high refrigerator, the soda fountain, and all the other typical things that sit behind a bar in a diner.

At the far end of the bar was a young woman, sitting on the last stool, dressed in a simple skirt and white apron, and other than Bing, she was the only person in the place. She had looked up briefly when Bing had pushed the door open and caused the bell to jingle, but she had quickly turned her attention back down to whatever it was she was doing.

Bing quickly looked around the diner again, singled out a booth that looked the least likely to be hiding ketchup or coffee spills, and sat down facing the back of the diner. He spread the newspaper out on the table, grabbed it firmly by the edges, lifted it up, shook it a couple of times, and then carefully rested his arms on the table, positioning the paper in front of him so that he couldn't see the girl at the end of the bar. Then, very gently, he eased the paper down so that it was just low enough for him to see her over the top of the page.

She had turned in her stool so that her left elbow was resting on the bar and her chin was resting in her left hand. She seemed to be looking over some bills or receipts and while her attention was thus directed, Bing took the opportunity to examine her closely.

She looked to be in her early twenties — simple looking, he thought, with sandy blonde hair pulled back away from her lightly freckled face. "She's not bad looking," thought Bing to himself, "but it's kind of an accidental good-looking. Like her parents were both really ugly and somehow their ugly features sort of blended well in her. I'll bet she'd have ugly kids," he reasoned.

Bing then thought about the way she had looked at him when he first entered. At first he had thought she turned away from him out of disinterest, her mind being wrapped up in her receipts, but now he thought that perhaps it was nervousness upon seeing him. He reasoned that not many sharp, sophisticated-looking men come into this diner and she was intimidated. As he pictured the scene in his mind's eye he began to imagine her eyes open just a little wider in surprise and her head jerk back to her work much faster than had actually been the case. Gradually, he convinced himself that she just didn't know what to do with such an obviously sophisticated man as himself.

Just then she let out a sigh, slapped her palms down gently on the counter, stared straight ahead for just an instant, pushed her work away, and stood up. She leaned across the counter and picked up a pad and a pencil, then turned and walked toward Bing's table.

The instant she had moved, Bing jerked his paper up higher so that she couldn't see him as she approached. He was beginning to feel the confidence that always came when he really knew someone's motives, the way he'd feel around a girl if someone had just informed him that that girl was madly in love with him. In fact, that was exactly how he felt, so as the girl approached his table, he did his best to look aloof, to look as if he had been thoroughly engrossed in his newspaper and had never even noticed her.

"Can I get you somethin'?" she asked him, her voice soft, with the lilt of a true southerner but without the shrill nasal qualities of a typical East Tennessee rural accent.

Bing lowered his paper as if he had just then noticed there was someone else in the diner. He looked up at her with an eyebrow raised and said, "Um . . . pardon me?"

"I asked if there was somethin' I could get for ya," she replied.

"Um . . . yes, there is," began Bing. "You could bring me a cup of coffee, black, and um . . . is that sign outside correct?"

"Which sign is that?"

"The one that said 'Best Pecan Pie in the World.' "

For the first time she let a smile creep onto her face, but as soon as it appeared, she glanced down at the floor. "I reckon so," she replied. "At least that's what Ladonna says."

Bing replied, not allowing himself to smile in an attempt to keep worshipper and worshipee at an appropriate distance. "Well, if Ladonna says it's the best then you'd better bring me a slice."

She jotted down his order on the pad. When she was finished, she didn't look up but merely said, "Be back in just a minute," turned, and walked back to the bar.

Bing raised his paper again. This time just high enough so that she could watch him. He didn't look up at all, but remained fixed to the page, imagining that he could feel her eyes upon him. If he had looked up he would have seen her busy at the coffee maker, her back turned, but he didn't look up and just continued to stare at the newspaper with one eyebrow raised, as if he were completely involved in reading. He knew she was intrigued by him and wanted to get a really good look at him, so Bing, reasoning that there was no harm in indulging the poor girl, kept staring at the newspaper so as not to interrupt her admiring gaze and make her nervous. In the meantime she was still busy with the coffee maker.

He absentmindedly turned the page, not even aware of what was on the page before, and remembered their brief conversation and the way he had held eye contact but she had not. He knew that she was beside herself in adoration, and yet felt so inferior to him and his obviously superior education and breeding that she couldn't return his gaze. He grinned a sheepish, narcissistic grin and enjoyed the eyes he felt staring at him still.

She had poured two cups of coffee and was now slicing off a generous piece of pie that was, in fact, two days old. She was slicing off a generous piece because if it wasn't eaten that day, they would have to throw it out, and she hated to see food go to waste. She placed one cup of coffee beside her work on the bar, grabbed the saucer with the pie and fork on it and the other cup of coffee, and walked around the bar toward her customer.

Bing heard her coming but didn't look up until she got to the table, again not wanting to embarrass her by catching her staring. Had he looked up as she crossed the room, he would have seen her concentrating on the cup of coffee, worrying about a spill, but he didn't look up, at least not until she reached the table.

She set the pie and coffee down in front of him and he looked up, still with his serious cocked eyebrow face and said, "Thanks."

She nodded and walked slowly back to her stool and returned to her work.

Bing looked at his piece of pie and smiled when he saw how big it was. It was nearly a full quarter of a pie. He immediately realized that this was a very simple attempt on the part of the young girl to indicate her affections for him. The childlike quality of her gesture of admiration made Bing release an audible chuckle and shake his head slowly from side to side. She was even simpler than he had first imagined. Giving a big piece of pie was right up there with passing notes in class and pulling pigtails in terms of sophistication, and the thought of it made Bing's smile widen enough to expose his perfect set of teeth.

While Bing was mentally sizing up the significance of the pie, he had forgotten that his admirer was still in the room. When he suddenly remembered her, and realized that she was most likely watching him, he immediately wiped the smile from his face and blushed slightly with the new awareness of her eyes upon him.

Bing quickly regained his composure and his face returned to its normal color. He picked up the fork off his pie plate and began to take a piece of pie. He was very self-conscious about eating because he knew that if he slipped up and dropped a piece in his lap or managed to stick a piece of pecan to his face, he would immediately compromise his position and tarnish the aura of perfection he had spent the last few minutes creating. So he took his first bite with caution and was quite relieved when none fell into his lap or stuck to his face. As he rolled the morsel over his tongue to chew it, he began to realize that it was quite a good pie — whether it was the world's best, he was in no position to judge, but it was very good. He tried a few more bites, again with no accidents, and gradually built up enough confidence to devour the rest of the pie quite quickly. He then turned his attention to the cup of coffee steaming on the formica, quite pleased with his pie-eating performance.

He was so pleased with his prowess with the pie that as he began to sip his coffee, he let his thoughts again turn to the young lady at the end of the counter. He desperately wanted to look at her again to see if the picture of her that was flashing through his mind was still accurate, but he wouldn't allow himself. He hated those awkward moments when two people's eyes meet as they catch themselves watching each other and he wanted to avoid that now; and besides, if she saw him watching her, she might think he was interested, which was, of course, absurd.

So while she was busy checking her bills and balancing her accounts, Bing was busy not watching her. He pictured her now in his mind. In his thoughts she was dressed not in her skirt and apron, but in the expensive women's clothes that women like his mother wear. He pictured her keeping house at his condominium, pouring him brandy when he returned from work, and giving him a backrub while he expounded on how difficult his day had been. He imagined her beneath the covers of his water bed, begging him to come make love to her while he sat at his desk, still in his tie, looking over his call list for the next day. He imagined her flitting about at a party for all their well-to-do friends, serving hors d'oeuvres and engaging in polite cocktail conversation. While he was imagining the young waitress in these domestic settings, he was staring blankly into the red vinyl of the facing seat in the booth. He had completely forgotten the cup of coffee in his right hand, which due to his inattention was listing severely over his lap, on the verge of spilling its contents. As his imagination raced deeper and deeper, his cup leaned farther and farther, until the scenes of domestic bliss he had imagined were rudely interrupted by the shock of hot coffee on his crotch.

The shock of the hot liquid hitting his body was so great that he involuntarily flinched in his seat and spilled more. He quickly gained control of himself and set the cup down on his saucer, the sound of which, at least to him, in the midst of his agitation and the silence of the room sounded deafening, but which to the young lady at the counter sounded like no more than a coffee cup being

set on a saucer. She didn't even turn around. Bing, on the other hand, was quite flustered. He immediately felt like he had just mimicked a scene from a Jerry Lewis movie, a scene so loud and violently slapstick that anyone who saw it would be rolling with laughter, all at his expense. He was now too embarrassed to look up as he pulled paper napkins from the dispenser and began to frantically dab up the coffee in his lap.

Finally his lap was dry enough to suit him, and his thoughts quickly turned to escaping from the scene of his ridiculous spill. He longed for the sanctuary of his BMW which could quickly get him away from Ladonna's Diner and the only witness to his blunder. He eventually mustered the courage to say, "Could I have my check please?" in a voice that wavered ever so slightly. He didn't, however, have the courage to look at the waitress as he spoke the words, choosing instead to nervously fold the day old newspaper, and therefore he missed the young woman's only reaction to the scene that had just transpired.

She hadn't even noticed his clanging coffee cup, it being a very common sound in the diner, so his nervous words were the first thing she heard. The sound caught her by surprise because she had become so involved with balancing her accounts that she had completely forgotten that there was a customer to be waited on. She reached across the counter to where the pad and pencil lay, picked them both up, and began to write on the pad. She then tore the top sheet off of the pad and without saying a word, walked over to Bing's table, placed the check face down on the table, and returned to her place at the bar to resume her work.

Bing was still too embarrassed to look up, so as she walked across the diner, he continued to fold his newspaper. He could see her in his mind, silently laughing at him as she approached the table, amused by his buffoonery, and his face grew redder at the thought. He watched out of the corner of his eye as she placed the check on his table, but he was still too uncomfortable to look up at the jeering face he had imagined. As her footsteps receded he reached quickly for the check and then flipped it over on the table. Written on it was:

| | |
|---|---|
| Coffee | $25 |
| Pie | $100 |
| | $125 |

Bing started to reach for his wallet when something hit him and he looked at the check again. "One hundred and twenty-five dollars!! For a damn piece of pie and cup of coffee?" he thought to himself. "She's mocking me now," he reasoned as the first beads of nervous sweat broke free from the pores on his forehead. He hesitated for just a moment, trying to decide if she was just trying to have some fun at his expense, perhaps in an effort to prevent him from leaving the diner with any dignity. He then reached for his wallet with a quick nervous jerk. He could feel her laughing eyes burning a hole through him. He took from his wallet a one-hundred dollar bill, a twenty, and a five, and placed them on the table, aching with the desire to leave.

He grabbed his paper and got up from the table, looking back at the money he had set beside his cup. He couldn't possibly bear to look at her now; she had gotten the best of him and the embarrassment was more than he could stand. Then, just for a brief instant, his upbringing got the best of him and the thought of leaving a tip crossed his mind. "To hell with that," he whispered hoarsely, staring at the money he had left on the table. He then made a quick, determined move toward the door, away from the waitress who still had her back to him and had missed her opportunity to witness his whole nerve-wracking crisis.

Bing threw the door open wide and stepped out into the early morning air, which felt cool on his hot, red face. He strode to his car, unlocked the door and stepped inside. The car started on the first attempt. He then jammed the gear shift into reverse, punched the gas, and popped the clutch, the net result of which was to remove a very thin layer of rubber from his tires and displace a few pieces

of gravel in the diner's parking lot. When he had gotten the car turned around, he put the transmission in first gear and went through the same sequence, only this time the car lurched forward and started out on the first of the fourteen miles that lay between Bing and Hornsby Hollow.

If Bing had turned around and taken one last look at Ladonna's Diner, he might have again noticed the sign on the front door that read: "Come On In, Were Open," at which point he might have realized that just like apostrophes, decimal points aren't used much in these parts.

## WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

At the Phillips 66 on Highway 21
Me and my momma saw Brother Bill Wayman
  With smoke coming out his mouth.
The gasoline fumes were making me sick
And the air just swimming through the heat
  And the smoke coming out his mouth.
Green and black oil streaming out on the ground,
Puddles where other folks were no good
At pumping gas, I guess, or got spooked
Or something and let that thing spin round
At them like a copperhead with the head
Cut off — she let me do it and I knew
My hands would smell and make my head hurt,
But I wasn't letting go though,
  It was a cigarette burning in his hand.

I lit a fire once in dry leaves
That near set the woods on fire.
Momma came running with pots
Too scared to be mad, chucking water
On a burning bush, like Moses',
The Lord appeared onto him like
A flaming fire, too, but it didn't
Hurt the bush none ( this one's gone).

Brother Bill spoke about burnt offerings
On Sunday — the Holy Spirit will
Baptize you with fire, too, if you
Don't look out instead of water
In your eyes you'll get smoke.
Folks that are bad, drink and cuss,
Got forked tongues of fire but the Lord
Puts words in preacher's heart and fire in his bones
That's where it hurts, I bet.
They say His fire can completely devow them
And run them over with chariots —
Brother Ed stands up in back and says,
"I am warm, I seen the fire . . . and
I done passed through it." Well Preacher Bill's
Done seen it and breathed it, too
And he's got the heartburn like Shadrach
And his brothers thrown in their own
Fiery furnace, tied up and wailing and
Mashing their teeth in every last fire
Like one day our hearts will burn, too
When it rains fire and burning stones
And we're pushed sprawling into our ovens
For more burnt offerings, then the woods will burn.

And here I am, sitting in the pew.
My daddy said this varnish would
Take to fire faster than we can say
Amen — my hands holding on hard,
My knuckles turning white, waiting.

J. MICHAEL KILBY

## AFTER RAIN

Wind rushes like a Spanish bull
into the multicolored cape of graceful leaves.

The leaves tingle with anticipation,
each one wanting to be the first to jump

into the swirl of wind
and be carried into the tie-dyed sky.

Only the top leaves are picked
to ride on the wind's back

leaving the tree naked
from the shoulders up.

LESLIE TATE

## FANTASY — 1 A.M.

Whispered I want you's full of passion
Blow in the wind with the wisps of hair
Back pressed to wall
Eyes follow the lightning framed in paint chips
Why are the walls beige?
It hides the dust stains, you see, but the music shakes the radiator.
The blank stare of the clock is annoying.
However, the closet is full so it must be endured.
The dreams pushed in the cork smile fondly,
defiers of yellow edges,
as perfume diffuses through the screens.
The door is cracked.
Please shut it.

MARTHA SISK

## POEM TO ADRIENNE RICH

She has seen her hands in the mirror
when she can no longer stand the sight of her face,
they make her think of hands that she has known.
She has to write hard to get away from the reflection
of her face on a well-scrubbed counter,
past the hands that are always there
pulling her back.

There have been times the only hands that she has touched
are the ones that rise up to greet her
when she places her fingers against the cold glass.

I see her at 2 AM typing in hard rhythms,
stones emerging from the page.
She closes her eyes and throws one at the mirror
and when she looks again, the cracks make a beautiful map
and a thousand of her hands are raised in goodbye.

F. M. O'ROARK

## 28 DECEMBER 1983

Cutting through tarnished glimmers,
Reverberations of quiet anguish
Crush fragile tinsel tendrils
& child-wrought plaster snowflakes.

Faint strains of worn carols,
Given form by anonymous mouths,
Stacatto tunelessly in dead air,
Discordant, corrupting the quiet.

Caught in Christmas clamor
The din disguises despair.
A silent baby Jesus stares upward
Unwilling to look into the dark.

Angry light casts shadows &
White walls catch the dark;
A thin cord is pulled taut by
A body stretching toward the ground.

Dreams deferred do not death defy;
Exhausted expectations do explode.
I never thought you'd be a poem.
I only thought you'd be alive.

MARCELLE SMITH

## MY FATHER

someone just tell
me please how
I will ever
know what in
me was really
in him too
and what I
have only made
up to fill
in the
void
I stare
and
stare at his everfading photograph
straining
to
absorb who he
was
into the gaps of my littlegirlhood memories

Everyone says I favor him,
my height even equals his —
doesn't that seem significant?
and his eyes look back at me from the mirror

(so how did
the world look
to him?

CARRIE GALLOWAY

## FISHING FOR NORTHERN PIKE LAKE BEMIDJI 1972

I heard the voice of God
just now
flowing through silent static
mingling
with fetid coffee
and burning butts
puking Alleluias
hang heavy
in the air

through sin smeared glass
we watch the fields
of grass
wrestling the weather
bow down
before us
                just me
and Bert in the back seat
sleeping
from East Grand Forks
to Hibbing

but maybe next time
we come this way
we'll stop
and fish
and watch the wind

STEVEN G. SUTTON

## I'VE BEEN WRITING MYSELF TOO LONG

Last Sunday I went to church
to see if they still believed in God
Somehow in the nerve of their hymns
they did
I slurred home and cried like a child
utterly lost.

A. L. HANDELSEN

# *Photography*

# Marx Lennon East West Flip Flop

Battle Scars

# Not Today

Maidens With A Map

# Texts and Textures

Becky's Pupil

# Women in Black

Portrait of Katherine Hancock

Slate, Slats, and Shadow

# Painting a Porch

Wimbledon Market

Peaceful Composition

# Town Keeper

# Midnight Manuscript

## Contributors

**Jeffrey Beach** is a sophomore English major, Art minor. He has worked extensively with the Mobruck Architechtural Firm in Boone, NC.

**Celina Bednar** is a sophomore from Connecticut. She says she is basically "undecided about life."

**Donna Bowman,** a sophomore from Chattanooga, Tennessee, plans to major in English. She is interested in pursuing writing as a career.

**Barnsley Brown** is a sophomore English major who will spend a semester in London this fall. Her interests include drama, writing and singing. She is presently involved in the musical production of "Oh, What a Lovely War" at Wake Forest. As of yet, Barnsley is undecided about her career plans.

**Jane E. Dunlap,** a junior from Charlotte, North Carolina, has been published previously in *North Carolina English Teacher* and the *Wake Forest Review.* A recipient of the 1982 NCTE Achievement Award in writing, she enjoys writing essays and poetry. Her other interests include music, drama and Russian.

**Mark Earnest** is a senior Carswell scholar from Kingsport, Tennessee who will attend Vanderbilt Medical School next fall on academic scholarship.

**David Friedersdorf** is a junior Carswell scholar from Cincinnati, Ohio. He is majoring in History.

**Carrie Galloway** is a first year graduate student at Wake Forest. She is studying English and is interested in teaching high school or college students.

**Sam Greenwood** is a junior Communications major from Lynchburg, Virginia who has been involved with photography for six years. He is currently working on a portfolio of fashion photography and aspires to attend graduate school.

**Gina Grubbs** is a senior with plans to spend the summer writing. She will try to sell a series of horror stories. Next year she would like to attend graduate school and/or do freelance writing. Gina lists her favorite authors as Thomas Hardy, H. P. Lovecraft, E. A. Poe and Stephen King.

**A. L. Handelsen** is a sophomore Pre-Med student who writes when she can't think of anything else to do — and to atone for being a science major. Her ambition is to write a novel in French.

**David Kellogg** is a senior English major from Silver Spring, Maryland who wants to understand James Joyce.

**Michael Kilby** is a senior English major from North Wilkesboro, North Carolina. A Carswell scholar and the recipient of the H. Broadus Jones Scholarship for seniors, he will attend medical school in the fall.

**T. Ward Kitchin** is a first time submittor to *The Student.* He is a senior English major from Jacksonville, North Carolina who plans to attend graduate school to earn his Ph.D.

**Charles E. Leftwich, Jr.** is a Sociology/Economics major. He writes: "As a sociologist I find photography to be a tool that exposes truth, beauty, and the abstract. Photographers who seek to focus on the social prospectives must be willing to step away from the viewfinder and involve themselves with the issue or subject. Photography not only creates . . . it develops."

**Greta Lutman** is a sophomore from Fayetteville, North Carolina who is an Anthropology major and an Art minor. She was recently selected as a finalist in a nationwide and Canada-wide photography contest from 17,000 entries. Her work was published in *Best Annual College Photography, 1985.*

**Timothy G. Murphy** is a sophomore Economics major from Rockaway, New Jersey who is interested in law. In 1984, *Time* magazine selected one of his short stories to be published in their literary magazine.

**F. M. O'Roark** is a senior English major who plans to attend graduate school to earn a Master of Fine Arts and Writing degree. In 1984 she won a first place award from the Academy of American Poets. In 1985 she won third place in the same competition and first place in *The Student* poetry contest.

**Martha Sisk,** a sophomore Biology major from Roanoke, Virginia, enjoys reading and writing poetry in her spare time.

**Marcelle Smith** is a first year graduate student in English. She earned her B.A. in English and received Teacher Certification at Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, Connecticut. Marcy says her "only firm conviction is that T. S. Eliot and amoebas may be applied to anything in the universe."

**Mary Elizabeth Sutton,** a senior Carswell scholar from Richmond, Kentucky is an English major who will attend the University of Virginia graduate school in the fall.

**Steven G. Sutton** is a Biology major who has plans to attend medical school. He is from Raleigh, North Carolina and has spent a semester in Spain.

**Leslie Tate** is a sophomore from Richmond, Virginia who hopes to continue writing and enter some type of English-related field.

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